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HONG KONG

THEY *HATE* US.

JUST BECAUSE WE'RE *KRYPTONIANS.*

NO MATTER *WHAT* WE DO, NO MATTER HOW WE *TRY*, THEY *STILL* HATE US.

WE ARE NOT *JUST* KRYPTONIANS, CHRIS.

YOU AND I, WE ARE *MORE*.

NO, *YOU* ARE MORE. I'VE *SEEN* WHAT YOU BECOME.

DO YOU LOVE ME, CHRIS?

YES, YES I DO.

DO YOU TRUST ME?

OF COURSE.

BUT YOU DO *NOT* BELIEVE ME.

I'VE *SEEN* WHAT YOU *BECOME*, THARA. AND I *BELIEVE* YOU WHEN YOU SAY THAT IT'S *THE* FLAMEBIRD, THAT SHE...*INHABITS* YOU, MANIFESTS THROUGH YOU.

AND I *KNOW*... I *FEEL* THE CONNECTION TO YOU, THE WAY I DID IN THE PHANTOM ZONE. BUT...

BUT YOU DO NOT *BELIEVE* ME.

I'M LOR-ZOD, THARA. I'M THE SON OF GENERAL ZOD AND COMMANDER URSA.

I WAS BORN IN THE PHANTOM ZONE, TRAPPED THERE FOR ***YEARS*** BEFORE THEY SENT ME TO ***EARTH.***

TRAPPED THERE A ***SECOND*** TIME UNTIL YOU ***SAVED*** ME.

WHAT ***GOD*** WOULD ***WANT*** THAT, THARA? WHAT GOD WOULD ***PICK*** ME?

I USE THE NAME ***NIGHTWING*** BECAUSE ***YOU*** GAVE IT TO ME, THAT'S ***ALL.***

I "GAVE" YOU THE NAME...

...BECAUSE THAT WAS THE NAME REVEALED TO ME.

THEN ***WHY*** CAN'T I DO WHAT ***YOU*** DO? IF I ***AM*** WHO YOU SAY I AM...

...WHY HASN'T THE NIGHTWING ***SHOWN*** HIMSELF TO ***ME?***

BECAUSE YOU CANNOT YET SEE IN THE ***DARK.***

THIS IS THE BOOK OF RAO.

LEARN OUR ***STORY.***

PERHAPS YOU WILL REALIZE WHAT YOU MEAN TO ME.

PERHAPS THEN, YOU WILL UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU ARE.

FEELS... WARM.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

ESTABLISHING NEURAL LINK.

NEURAL LINK ESTABLISHED. STAND BY...

...THARA?

...WHERE AM I?

WHAT IS THIS PLACE?

QUERY: "WHERE AM I? WHAT IS THIS PLACE?"

RESPONSE: YOU ARE IN THE SYSTEM LOBBY. FINAL NEURAL NETWORK CALIBRATION COMPLETED. TRANSLATION ALGORITHM LACED TO CEREBRAL CORTEX.

DO YOU HAVE A FURTHER QUERY?

...TELL ME ABOUT THE NIGHTWING.

NNNGH!

VERY WELL.

TO TELL THE NIGHTWING'S STORY IS TO TELL THE STORY OF THREE, THE FLAMEBIRD, THE BUILDER, AND THE NIGHTWING. AS WITH KRYPTON ITSELF, THEIR STORY BEGINS IN FIRE.

Once, the infinite was burning chaos. Devoid of form, devoid of order, devoid of intellect, filled only with the insatiable hunger of endless conflagration.

Amid this chaos, an awareness stirred.

It surveyed the disorder and grew displeased at such waste, waste on an infinite scale.

"No more," it thought, and by that simple act created a new paradigm in the heavens. Thus was born force of will, the very concepts of order, of nature, of action and reaction.

And as it grew stronger, it chose for itself a name, and by doing so created the concept of names, the first time an individual will imposed order upon chaos.

And the first voice ever spoken declared its name:

DIVINE SPARK

PART 4

FROM THE MISTS OF LOST KRYPTON, STORIES ARE TOLD OF TWO MYTHICAL HEROES WHO TIME AND TIME AGAIN ROSE TO PROTECT THEIR PEOPLE FROM TYRANNY AND TERROR—

NIGHTWING AND FLAMEBIRD

GREG RUCKA & ERIC TRAUTMANN: Writers – PERE PÉREZ: Artist
FERNANDO DAGNINO & RAÚL FERNANDEZ: Book of Rao Artists
JAVIER MENA: Colorist – ROB LEIGH: Letterer – CAFU with SANTIAGO ARCAS: Cover
WIL MOSS: Asst. Editor – MATT IDELSON: Editor

SUPERMAN created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster

I am Rao.

THIS... IS RAO?

THIS IS AN IDEALIZED REPRESENTATION OF RAO (MAY HIS NAME BE UNIVERSALLY HONORED), EXTRACTED FROM KRYPTONIAN RELIGIOUS GUILD ARCHIVES.

And with these words, no longer did flame devour the heavens. Rao-The-Newly-Born imposed structure on the chaos, and took its vast power into himself.

And Rao-The-Newly-Born cast his eyes throughout the pristine barrens of the universe, and saw that it was pure; it was clean; it was ordered; and it was empty.

And thus a new concept entered into the void:

Loneliness.

Rao pondered this loneliness, until, reaching into himself for a small fraction of the energies harnessed within...

WHY ARE YOU SHOWING ME THIS? WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH--

THE STORY OF THE NIGHTWING AND THE FLAMEBIRD IS THE STORY OF CREATION.

...And transformed the flames of chaos into the fires of creation, and thus were the machineries of the universe created, made manifest by Rao-The-Newly-Born's precision and control.

Stars burned in the void; newborn planets cooled beneath Rao's gaze; until, at last, only one task remained. For these worlds, without a proper guiding hand, would remain as empty as the void itself.

Then Rao turned his eye to a newly formed jewel in his heavens. This would be the birthplace of his greatest creation. And he gave it a name, and called it Krypton.

Thus did he become Rao-The-First-Kryptonian, and he smiled anew, and released many fragments of his infinite power, and each was alive with his designs, and each was an instrument of his divine will.

And so he became Rao-The-Father, and among his favored children -- and there were many, though their tales are for other days -- was The Flamebird.

I THOUGHT... THERE WERE ONLY TWO. *NIGHTWING* AND *FLAMEBIRD.*

INCORRECT HYPOTHESIS. KRYPTONIAN RAO-ORTHODOX PANTHEON CONTAINS 14 MAJOR DEITIES, 211 DEMIGODS, 1402 TITANS.

THEY ARE NOT RELEVANT TO YOUR INITIAL QUERY. STORING DISCUSSION TRACK FOR LATER PLAYBACK.

WOW.

SHE'S... BEAUTIFUL.

The Flamebird, made of chaos fire, released to perform a singular duty: necessary renewal and rebirth. To clear away that which is harmful or fallow, that something greater may grow in its place.

And so that the chaos fire within her would not burn rampant or uncontrolled, Rao-The-Father designed for The Flamebird a directing force: love.

The Flamebird's love is fierce, and among those she loved most was another of Rao-The-Father's children, and his name is Vohc, called The Builder.

Vohc-The-Builder, whose hands are guided by endless curiosity and boundless desire to create, to craft, to improve upon that which he has built before, and to inscribe Rao-The-Father's signature upon the material world. Vohc-The-Builder, the maker of things in the twilight, in the space between day and night.

Vohc-The-Builder, inspired to ever-greater feats of creation by his own love for The Flamebird.

THAT JUNGLE...SHE'S DESTROYING IT?

PERIODIC CULLING OF ECOSYSTEM IS NECESSARY, TO PREVENT STAGNATION.

THIS IS THE FLAMEBIRD'S RAO-GIVEN FUNCTION.

RECONSTRUCTION AND IMPROVEMENT: THAT IS THE RAO-GIVEN FUNCTION OF VOHC-THE-BUILDER.

Through the eons, the children of Rao played their game of creation and destruction.

Vohc-The-Builder, compelled by the will of his father, inspired by the love of his sister, faced his task with joy. In devotion, he crafted ever-more delicate and elegant engines of creation: the perfect sunset; the most lush jungle; the hardiest beast; the mightiest river.

I'VE SEEN FLAMEBIRD--

--WHOA--

--AND NOW I'VE SEEN VOHC.

SO WHERE IS THE NIGHTWING?

ACCESSING.

The Flamebird, compelled by the will of her father, her devotion to her brother, faced her task with joy, and razed Vohc's constructions, inspiring him to ever-greater feats of craft.

Theirs was a divine contest, played in harmony, a precise mechanism that shaped the surface of Rao-The-Father's chosen jewel, Krypton.

THE NIGHTWING. IN RAO-ORTHODOX DOCTRINE, LITERALLY-- "RAO THE-FATHER'S WATCHFUL EYES IN THE DARKNESS."

FRIEND TO VOHC-THE-BUILDER.

--AND SO YOU JOIN ME AGAIN, MY SHADOWY FRIEND?

SUCH IS MY FATE AND MY DUTY, HE-WHO-BUILDS--

--TO STAND ALONE IN THE DARK. ALL-SEEING, NEVER SEEN.

AH, BUT I *DO* SEE YOU, FRIEND NIGHTWING. AND PERHAPS, IF YOU WISH IT--

--I CAN FIND A WAY TO CAST SOME LIGHT INTO YOUR SHADOWS.

THAT WOULD BE... AGREEABLE.

Rao-The-Father created The Nightwing, His Eyes in the Night. Thus the duty was charged from his Father to seek out evil and corruption that hides in the shadows; to pursue and destroy it.

So it is that The Nightwing exists in the darkness, all-seeing in the deep night, hidden to daylight eyes.

Thus The Nightwing's mission was the loneliest of all Rao's children.

But in the border of twilight, where Vohc-The-Builder would toil, The Nightwing could be seen. And thus, together in the dark and near-dark, did The Nightwing and Vohc-The-Builder become friends. And so it was that Vohc saw his brother's loneliness, and understood, and sought to ease it. And he made a bridge between The Nightwing's shadow realm and The Flamebird's daystar glow.

And in that act of kindness were created the seeds of betrayal, hatred, and vengeance.

I HAD NO IDEA.

USER ERROR: NO IDEA.

I HAD NO IDEA HOW... PRIMAL IT ALL IS.

JUST HOW POWERFUL THE BOND BETWEEN THEM--*US*--IS.

NOT UNREASONABLE. OTHERS FAILED TO REALIZE THE DEPTH OF THAT BOND AS WELL.

At the sight of The Flamebird, the loneliness of The Nightwing was eased, and joy filled his heart. And The Flamebird, rapt by the stillness and silence of The Nightwing, returned his love in kind. And thus in twilight they would meet, and be happy.

As the twilight faded unto deepest night, Vohc-The-Builder spoke to The Nightwing. From primordial darkness, The Nightwing thanked his brother, the engineer of his happiness, who had eased the loneliness of his vigils.

And Vohc-The-Builder beheld the love between his kin, and was inspired once more. This was a new inspiration, as bottomless and hungry as the fires of chaos yoked within him.

Troubled, Vohc-The-Builder searched Krypton for the precise location upon which to give form to his inspiration, to the crowning achievement of his existence, his purpose. It would be the ultimate expression of his love for The Flamebird, who had given her heart to another.

SOMETHING TROUBLES YOU, BROTHER.

I SOMETIMES FORGET THERE ARE NO SECRETS FROM YOU, MY FRIEND.

IN TRUTH, SOMETHING HAS BEEN WEIGHING ON ME.

DON'T WORRY.

ALL *WILL* BE WELL.

Vohc-The-Builder began his masterpiece, an expression of the pure, unselfish love he held for his muse. All that Vohc loved about The Flamebird he made manifest in the creature he fashioned.

A fitting monument, he declared, one worthy of his love.

And seeing his tribute, The Flamebird praised her brother's work, and marveled at the creature. And she raised her hands to rain down fire, as her duty and nature both commanded

For the first time, Vohc-The-Builder pleaded for what he had made. He implored her to look close, to see the truth in his craft, that she would know the depth and strength of his love.

"And this is the expression of my love," spake The Flamebird "From this renewal, you shall create that which is greater."

Thus Vohc-The-Builder saw his offering burnt to ash before him, and with it his love for The Flamebird And the void in its place was filled with something new to Rao-The-Father's creation:

Boundless sorrow, and the seeds of madness.

WHAT IS THIS NEW CREATION, BROTHER?
THIS IS MY MASTERPIECE, A TRIBUTE TO THE FLAMEBIRD.
IT IS MY HEART.
BE CAUTIOUS, MY FRIEND. SHE IS FIRE, AND FIRE CAN BURN AS WELL AS WARM.
...OH, NO.
--BEG YOU, PLEASE, IF YOU HAVE ANY LOVE IN YOUR HEART FOR ME--
DEAR KINSMAN, HAVE NO FEAR. WE DO AS WE MUST.
NO! WAIT!
STOP!
THIS WILL ALL LEAD TO SOMETHING GREATER.

GLORIOUS, MY BROTHER! DO YOU SEE NOW? THIS IS TRULY YOUR GREATEST WORK.

UNTIL YOUR NEXT.

YES. I SEE.

MUST THIS ALSO BE DESTROYED?

TEMPERED, HE-WHO-BUILDS. IMPROVED. AS RAO-OUR-FATHER WILLS.

VERY WELL.

WE *ALL* DO WHAT WE *MUST.*

SOMETHING'S NOT RIGHT--

CORRECT.

THIS IS THE HERESY OF THE BREAKER.

NNYAAAAA!

NIGHTWING!

In deepening madness, there grew a cold certainty. The Flamebird had destroyed that which Vohc-The-Builder loved, and in so doing, had poisoned his love for her. And what did The Flamebird love?

To punish The Flamebird, so too must he hurt The Nightwing.

He set his hand to a new creation, a magnificent spire of purest crystal, in which he planted vast reserves of power. And when the spire was completed, Vohc-The-Builder faced the judgment of The Flamebird.

"It is magnificent," she cried. "What is its function?"

"All will be clear," was Vohc-The-Builder's only response.

And so, heart singing with joy, The Flamebird struck out with divine fire.

Then the fabric of nature tore and howled in agony and through that tear was created a new space of phantoms and emptiness: Vohc-The-Builder's monument to the void that Rao-The-Father so abhorred

As the spire shattered, one fragment pierced the shadows, imprisoning The Nightwing within an impenetrable nothingspace.

BELOVED!

"BELOVED"?

I SHOULD BE YOUR BELOVED, NOT SOME SKULKING WRAITH, A KEEPER OF SECRETS, A BETRAYER OF FRIENDS.

YOU DESTROY ALL THAT I HAVE BUILT IN YOUR HONOR, AND *STILL* YOU CALL HIM "BELOVED."

RAO-THE-FATHER'S WILL BE DAMNED TO THE VOID.

I SHALL BUILD NO MORE.

I SHALL BREAK.

RELEASE HIM, VOHC-THE-BREAKER!

RELEASE HIM!

THERE IS NO RELEASE. HE IS BUT A *PHANTOM* NOW.

YOU SHALL HURT AS I HURT, FOREVER SEPARATED FROM YOUR "BELOVED."

The Flamebird screamed in rage and pain. Where once she felt the reassuring presence of The Nightwing, there was now only emptiness.

She beat against the prison with all her chaos might but could not free her love, so elegant were the mechanisms of Vohc-The-Builder.

Now, in his madness, Vohc-The-Builder offered The Flamebird a bargain: Deny her love for The Nightwing, and he would release him; refuse, and they would spend eternity apart.

"I cannot betray my nature, kinsman," The Flamebird pleaded, "Nor my heart."

Then Vohc-The-Builder cursed her, and cursed the will of Rao-The-Father. "If I cannot win your heart with creation," he cried, "I shall earn your fear with destruction!"

And thus Vohc-The-Builder turned away from his Father and freed within himself the fires of chaos Rao-The-Father had yoked there, and made himself anew. He cast aside his tools and fashioned in their place cruel and terrible instruments of devastation.

So it was that Vohc-The-Builder ended and made himself Vohc-The-Breaker, the Betrayer of Kin, the First Heretic, an abomination in the eyes of Rao.

NEURAL LINK TERMINATED

THE NIGHTWING IS STILL TRAPPED IN THERE? IN THE PHANTOM ZONE?

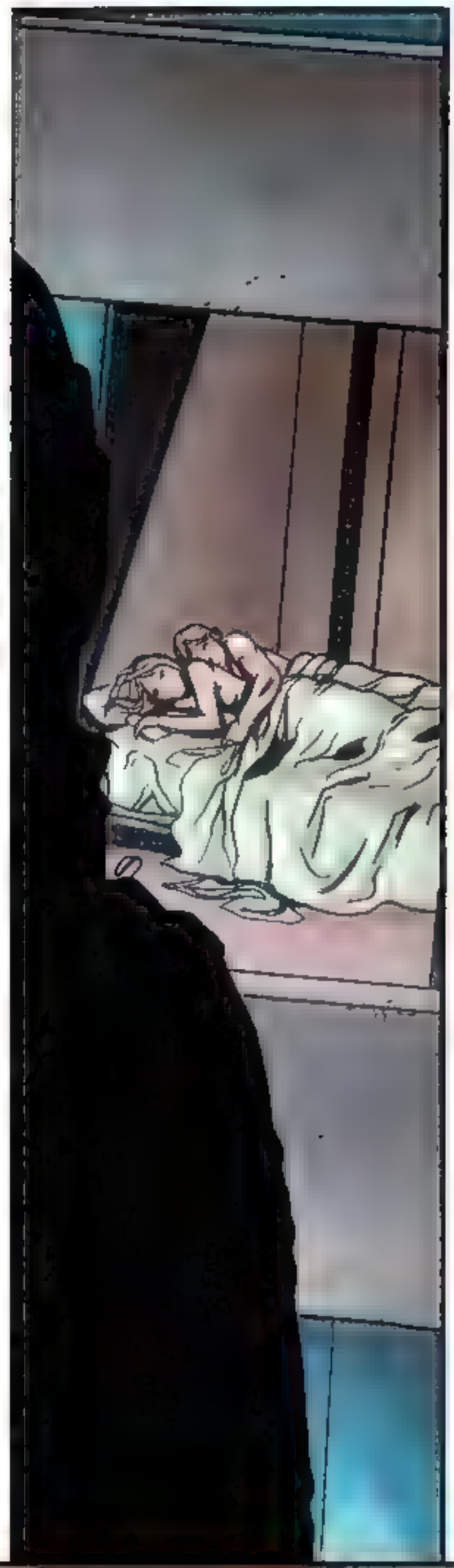
THE *ZONE* IS GONE, SHATTERED.

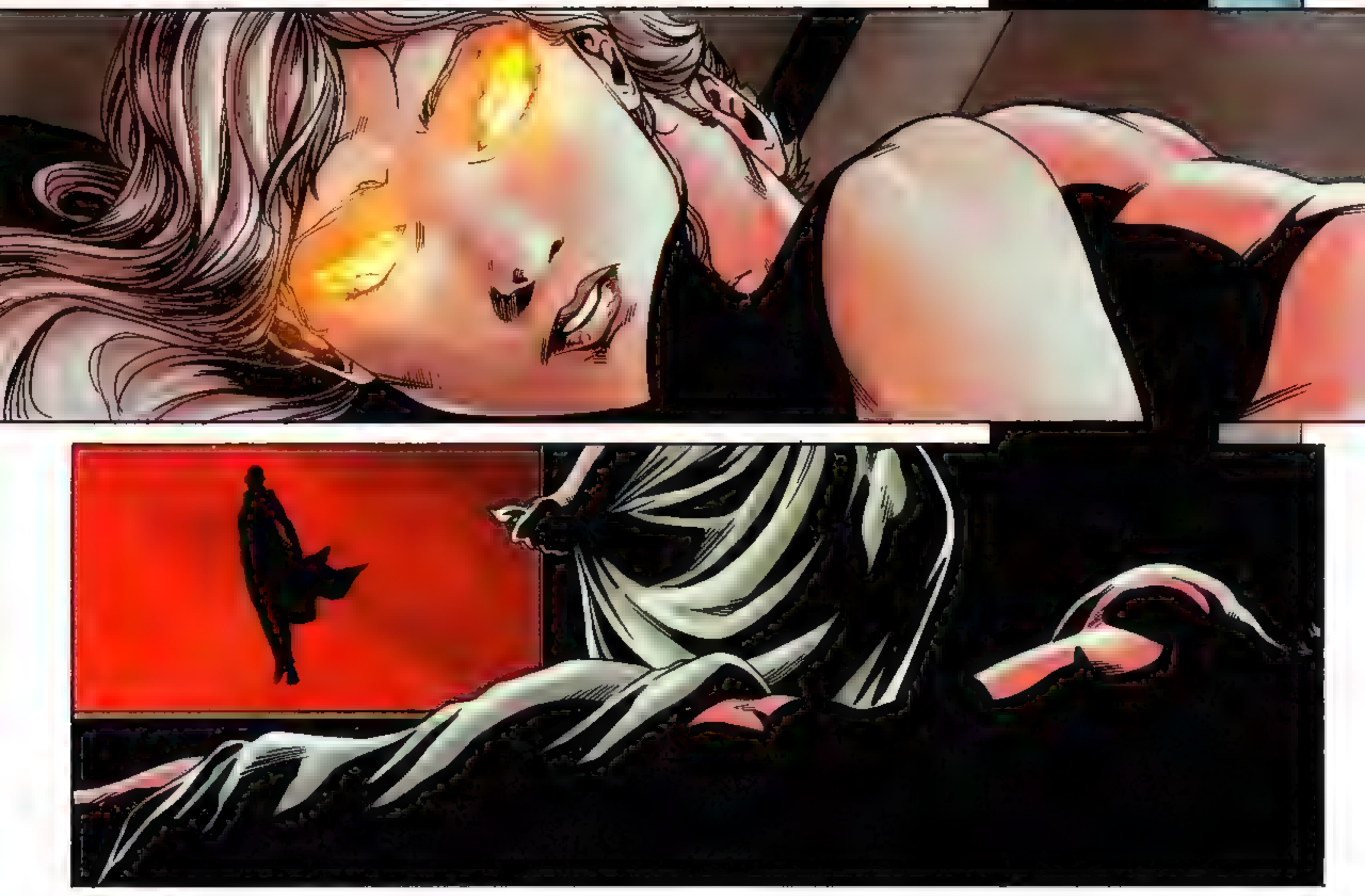
AND YOUR OTHER HALF *LOST* WITH IT.

YOU FREED ME.

TOGETHER, WE CAN FREE *HIM*.

I LOVE YOU, THARA.





I HOPE YOU ENJOYED THAT, BECAUSE THE BILL'S COME DUE.

HAVE YOU NO LOVE LEFT FOR ME AT ALL?

I HAVE WHAT YOU MADE.

I HAVE ASHES.

BRING HIM TO THE TEMPLE OF UR TOMORROW.

THERE YOU WILL SEE MY NEW CREATION...

...ONE THAT WILL WITHSTAND EVEN YOUR FLAMES.

DHI QAR PROVINCE, IRAQ.

I'M NOT *SURE* ABOUT THIS, THARA.

SHE SPOKE TO ME IN MY *DREAMS* LAST NIGHT. SHE SAID WE WERE TO COME *HERE*.

AND AFTER LAST NIGHT, I CAN HARDLY *REFUSE*.

I CAN'T REALLY ARGUE WITH THAT.

WOULD HAVE BEEN *NICE* OF THE FLAMEBIRD TO TELL YOU *WHY*.

SHE HAS BEEN REMARKABLY *QUIET* THESE LAST FEW DAYS...

...NORMALLY HER *SONG* IS ALWAYS IN MY MIND, BUT--

I *SEE* IT!

THERE DOESN'T SEEM TO BE ANYONE AROUND...

NO, THERE'S A *CHAMBER* BELOW IT, UNDERGROUND. YOU CAN *SEE*...

...WAIT, THERE'S A--

--OH *NO!*

QUICK! COME ON!

HOW NICE TO SEE YOU BOTH AGAIN.

YOU *MURDERED* THOSE PEOPLE! YOU *SLAUGHTERED* THEM!

I WAS *FINISHED* WITH THEM.

...DOCTOR PILLINGS?

NO.

JAX-UR.

YOU'RE *JUST* IN TIME.

STOP!

ANOTHER SPY--

"ACT IN HASTE..."

"...REGRET AT LEISURE."

BIP

AAAAARRRGGHHHH!!!

WHAT HAVE YOU *DONE* TO HIM?

MICROSEEDED SUNSTONE CRYSTALS THROUGHOUT HIS CIRCULATORY SYSTEM.

THE *PAIN* OF THEIR *GROWTH* IS *EXCRUCIATING.*

MY LITTLE *TOY* DOES MORE THAN KEEP HIM FROM *AGING.*

THIS IS A *TRAP*...ALL OF THIS...

...BUT SHE *TOLD* ME TO COME HERE...

SHE CLOUDS YOUR MEMORY.

YOU SOLD YOUR *BIRTHRIGHT* FOR YOUR *BELOVED*...

...THAT I MIGHT *BUILD* THIS!

WHAT HAVE YOU *DONE*, JAX-UR?

WHAT *IS* THAT... *THING?*

I'M SURPRISED YOU DON'T RECOGNIZE HIM, LITTLE FLAMEBIRD. HE'S *FAMILY*, AFTER ALL.

OUR FAMILY.

HE'S *GOD.*

TO BE CONTINUED!

AND NOW... CAPTAIN ATOM

YES, I'VE HEARD OF MIRABAI.

WE *ALL* HAVE. SHE'S JUST NOT SOMEONE WE ENJOY TALKING ABOUT.

SHE USED ME. MADE ME A WEAPON.

I *CAN'T* SAY I'M SURPRISED, CAPTAIN.

I MEAN... SHE'S *NOT* A NICE WOMAN.

GOTTA SAY, RULERS, I HAVE FOUND--*ESPECIALLY* THOSE REIGNING OVER MAGICAL AND/OR SUPERNATURAL KINGDOMS--RARELY ARE...NICE.

BUT YOU'RE FREE OF HER NOW.

YES, BUT HER PEOPLE *AREN'T* FREE. AND I HURT THEM. HELPED HER TO.

SO YOU WANT TO MAKE GOOD.

YEAH. NO. *MORE.* I NEED TO. FOR THEM *AND* FOR ME.

BUT THERE'S SO MUCH I DON'T KNOW ABOUT THE PLACE. IT'S--

HELL, I DON'T EVEN KNOW HOW TO GET THERE.

I WAS HOPING YOU COULD...LIKE *um...* "*PORTAL*" ME THERE?

OH YEAH, AND *WHAT'S* ITS NAME? I MEAN, IT DOES HAVE A NAME, RIGHT?

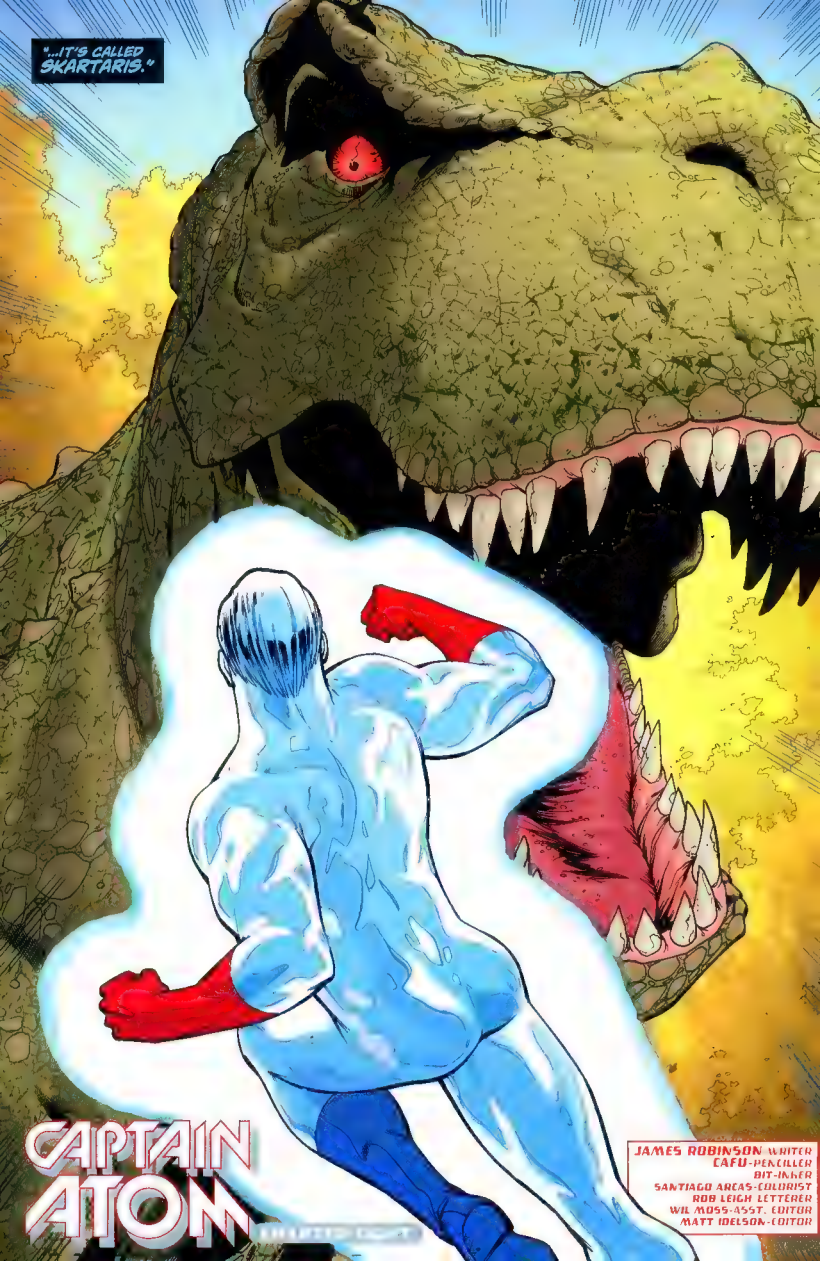
OF COURSE, CAP. KIND OF OBVIOUS WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT IT, TOO...

...IT'S CALLED SORCERERS' WORLD!
IT'S THE LOCUS FOR ALL THE MAGIC HERE ON EARTH AS WELL AS OTHER ARCANE WORLDS AND DIMENSIONS.
IFÉ.
GEMWORLD.
MXYZPTLK'S 5th DIMENSION.
JEJUNE REALM.
MYRRA, WHERE OUR BUDDY JIM ROOK, THE NIGHTMASTER, LIVES.
AND SO, IN TURN, THE LAND OF NIGHTSHADES.
THE GREEN. THE GREY. THE RED. COUNTLESS OTHER REALMS AND WORLDS.
HELL, EVEN HELL...THE GATES UP TO IT, ANYWAY...
SORCERERS' WORLD IS THE HUB TO ALL OF IT. THE HEART.
CAPTAIN?

I SEE YOU'RE IN SAFE HANDS NOW, SO...I'M GOING.
I HAVE A NOTION. IT MAY HELP YOU... IT WORKED ONCE, SO MAYBE IT'LL WORK AGAIN.
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT, MON?
I DON'T WANT TO SAY UNTIL I'M SURE IT'S A GOOD IDEA. WHEN YOU GET BACK FROM... UM...SORCERERS' WORLD, IF WHAT I'M GOING TO TRY WORKS, YOU'LL KNOW.
THANKS, MON. REALLY, THANKS... FOR ALL YOU DID.
HEY, I'M NOT FINISHED YET. BESIDES, IT'S WHAT WE DO, YEAH? THE RIGHT THING.
MON? TELEPORTER.
NO THANKS...
"...I PREFER THE STARS."
BOY, THAT GUY'S WEIRD SOMETIMES.

SO SORCERERS' WORLD. HOW DO I GET BACK THERE?
THERE'S NO MAGIC CARPET, I'M SORRY TO SAY. IT'S A PROBLEM.
PROBLEM?
BIG PROBLEM. YOU.
ALL THOSE PLACES WE MENTIONED... MAGICAL PLACES. THE CONCENTRATION OF MAGICAL ENERGY THERE IS TOO MUCH FOR YOUR UNIQUE METALLIC SKIN AND NON-MAGICAL POWER INSIDE YOU.
THAT ENERGY... YOU...IT'S LIKE "ANTI-MAGIC."
THAT'S WHAT MADE YOU SUCH A VALUABLE WEAPON FOR MIRABAI.
BUT SORCERERS' WORLD... IF MAGICAL PLACES ARE A NO-GO, HOW DID I STAY THERE?
YEAH. CAN'T EXPLAIN THAT.
BUT EVERY PLACE YOU'D PASS THROUGH TO GET WHERE YOU WANT... SET ONE FOOT IN ANY ONE OF THEM, YOU'D BE EXPELLED BACK OUT AGAIN BY THE RAW MYSTICAL ENERGY IN THE AIR ALONE.
SO I NEED ONE OF GENERAL LANE'S GATEWAYS...LIKE MAJOR FORCE USED TO GET ME OUT AND BACK TO EARTH.
WAY RISKY, NATE. IF LANE GETS WIND OF YOUR PLANS--
Hmm. YEAH. IF I'M EXPECTED, THEN I'M DONE BEFORE I'VE EVEN STARTED.
HOLD ON. HOLD ON. I AM ONE BIG DUMB MONKEY...
...SHOULD HAVE THOUGHT.
THERE'S ONE PLACE WITH A CLEAR THROUGH-LINE FROM EARTH TO SORCERERS' WORLD...BUT WITH AN ENERGY THAT'S SIMILAR ENOUGH TO EARTH'S--
IF YOU SAY SO. HOW DO I GET THERE?
OKAY. THEN YOUR FIRST STOP...

"...CHINA.
"TRY TO AVOID ANY OF THE METAS THEY GOT.
"THOUGH FROM WHAT I'VE HEARD, THAT'S HARDER TO DO THAN IT USED TO BE.
"ANYWAY, YOU GET THROUGH THAT LEG, MAKE YOUR WAY TO THE HIMALAYAS.
"THERE'S ONE CAVERN. CRAZY HOW HARD IT IS TO SEE FROM THE OUTSIDE...
"...YET HOW BIG IT IS WITHIN."
"AND WHERE WILL IT TAKE ME? DOES WHERE I'M HEADING EVEN HAVE A NAME?"
"SURE, CAP. EVERYWHERE'S CALLED SOMETHING BY SOMEBODY.
"IN FACT YOU MIGHT'VE HEARD OF THIS PLACE ALREADY. FOR SURE, MAYBE...


"...IT'S CALLED SKARTARIS."
CAPTAIN ATOM
THIRTY-EIGHT
JAMES ROBINSON WRITER
CAFU-PENCILLER
BIT-INKER
SANTIAGO ARCAS-COLORIST
ROB LEIGH LETTERER
WIL MOSS-ASST. EDITOR
MATT IDELSON-EDITOR

BATMAN. DOC SAVAGE. THE SPIRIT. TOGETHER.

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SPECIAL SNEAK PREVIEW

MARCH 2010

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POLITICIANS, CELEBRITIES, FOREIGN DIGNITARIES--THEY ALL TURNED OUT TO PAY RESPECTS TO CLARK SAVAGE, SENIOR.

TOO BAD THE PAPERS ONLY TALKED ABOUT THE ONE MAN WHO *DIDN'T.*

MONK...

IT'S ALL RIGHT, HAM. I UNDERSTAND MONK'S FRUSTRATION.

LOOK, DOC, IT'S JUST, WHEN YOU GO AWAY--

--HE NEEDS SOLITUDE...TO REFLECT...TO CONDUCT HIS EXPERIMENTS.

I *GET* THAT, RENNY, BUT IF ONE OF US HAD A WAY TO CONTACT--

THEN IT WOULDN'T *BE* SOLITUDE, *WOULD* IT?

IF IT'S ANY COMFORT, MONK, THE TIME I SPEND AWAY IS--WAS-- BY MY FATHER'S DESIGN.

AND YES, HE'S LOST TO ME NOW, BUT THE IRONY *ISN'T.*

CLARK SAVAGE SR

SO, IS IT TRUE HE SUCCUMBED TO AN UNKNOWN ILLNESS?

THAT'S RIGHT. NOTHING THE CORONER OR THE COUNTY MEDICAL STAFF HAD EVER *SEEN* BEFORE.

HMM.

HAM, WILL YOU FILE THE PROPER PAPERWORK TO HAVE THE BODY EXHUMED?

WHAT? DOC--IT'S BEEN *THREE WEEKS...*

I'M *AWARE* OF THAT-- AND...

"...THAT TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE."

JESUS.

IS HE?...

WILDWOOD CEMETERY, CENTRAL CITY.

SNOOOORRRKE

NUTTY?

AS A BEDBUG.

HEY! WHAT GIVES, DOLAN?

I NEED A FEW WORDS WITH YOU, DENNY.

WAIT FOR ME IN THE CAR, BOYS.

SO, HOW GOES THE CRIME FIGHTING BUSINESS?

I COULD ASK YOU THE SAME...

'CEPT FOR THE FACT YOU'RE NOT IN IT.

CARETAKER

HMMM... YOU JUDGE ME TOO HARSHLY. I'M A CIVIL SERVANT, SWORN TO UPHOLD THE PEACE...

WHOSE?

OF COURSE I'M INTERESTED PRIMARILY IN MINE.

To: Mike Marts

From: Ian Sattler

Hey Marts - Thanks for showing me ALL of the covers to the Return of Bruce Wayne. They're even more awesome than you said! I know we haven't let these out to the public yet, so I promise not to show them around. Gotta go write DC Nation now...TTYL

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